

SENATE JOINT RESOLUTION 93

By McNally

A RESOLUTION to designate a segment of State Route 116 in Anderson County as the "Fraterville Miners Memorial Highway".

WHEREAS, it is most appropriate that this General Assembly should name a certain state highway to commemorate an event that, although it occurred more than one hundred years ago, continues to resonate through the lives of many Tennesseans today, providing a valuable lesson about life and how to live it; and

WHEREAS, on May 19, 1902, near the Coal Creek community of Anderson County, the Fraterville Mine exploded, trapping more than 200 miners underground and eventually killing all of them, the youngest of whom was twelve years old; and

WHEREAS, without question, the 1902 Fraterville Mine Explosion was the worst disaster in the history of mining in the South, and the echoes of this tragedy can still be heard today, as the good people who live in the Coal Creek watershed continue to celebrate Memorial Day on May 19 of each year; and

WHEREAS, as many as 216 bodies were recovered from the Fraterville Mine, but only 184 could be identified; itinerant miners killed in the explosion were not included in the official listing of fatalities because their names were unknown, although they were appropriately buried in graves marked by simple fieldstones; and

WHEREAS, the great magnitude of this disaster is perhaps best illustrated through the following simple yet staggering facts: after the mine exploded, there were only three men left alive in the town of Fraterville; literally hundreds of women were widowed and approximately one thousand children were left without a father; and one mother lost all five of her sons and two of her daughters lost their husbands; and

WHEREAS, the more than 200 men and boys who lost their lives in the Fraterville Mine Explosion are buried in various cemeteries in the Coal Creek (now Lake City) community, with many of their tombstones featuring the humble yet moving inscription: “Gone But Not Forgotten”; and

WHEREAS, 89 of the Fraterville miners are buried in concentric circles in the Miners’ Circle at Leach Cemetery; a monument at the center of the Miners’ Circle list the names of the 184 identified miners; and

WHEREAS, this year’s Memorial Day ceremony at the Fraterville Miners’ Circle will indeed be a special occasion, as the descendents of the miners and their fellow citizens of the Coal Creek watershed will not only be observing the 103<sup>rd</sup> anniversary of the disaster, but will also be commemorating the recent addition of the Fraterville Miners’ Circle to the National Register of Historic Places; and

WHEREAS, in joining Bunker Hill, Gettysburg, and Pearl Harbor on the National Register of Historic Places, the Fraterville Miners’ Circle has been recognized as a cultural resource worthy of preservation and as a historical site that helps to define who we are as a people and a Nation; and

WHEREAS, many of the more than 200 men and boys who perished in the Fraterville Mine Explosion died instantly, but at least 26 others lived up to seven hours before suffering a horrible death by suffocation; and

WHEREAS, ten of these miners left behind poignant farewell messages (uniformly focusing on God and family) that provide a unique perspective on what is important in life, including Jacob Vowell’s heartbreaking lamentation: “Oh God, for one more breath.”; and

WHEREAS, these farewell messages written by the Fraterville miners were published in newspapers around the world, raising public awareness about the dangers of coal mining and putting a very human face on this disaster; and

WHEREAS, the increased public awareness about coal mining resulted in the implementation of government safety regulations and the development of rescue methods, and, in general, initiated the long and arduous journey towards the safer working conditions that miners benefit from today; and

WHEREAS, the 1902 Fraterville Mine Explosion is undoubtedly of great historical and cultural significance, and while nothing could completely mitigate the horrible effects of this disaster, it is heartening to know that the more than 200 Fraterville Miners did not die in vain, but rather their deaths brought about improved working conditions and a higher standard of life for their compatriots today; now, therefore,

BE IT RESOLVED BY THE SENATE OF THE ONE HUNDRED FOURTH GENERAL ASSEMBLY OF THE STATE OF TENNESSEE, THE HOUSE OF REPRESENTATIVES CONCURRING, that for the reasons and purposes delineated in the preamble of this resolution, that segment of State Route 116 in Anderson County from such route's intersection with U.S. Highway 25W southward through the Briceville community to its intersection with State Route 330 is hereby designated the "Fraterville Miners Memorial Highway" as a lasting tribute to the enduring contributions of the more than 200 men and boys who perished in the 1902 Fraterville Mine Explosion near Coal Creek (now Lake City) in Anderson County.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the department of transportation is directed to erect suitable signs or to affix suitable markers designating such segment of State Route 116 as the "Fraterville Miners Memorial Highway".

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that the erection of such signs shall be within the guidelines prescribed by the Manual on Uniform Traffic Control Devices.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that this resolution shall become operative only if the cost of the manufacture and installation of such signs is paid to the department of transportation from non-state funds within one (1) year of the effective date of this resolution. Such payment shall be made prior to any expenditure by the state for the manufacture or installation of such signs. The department shall return any unused portion of the estimated cost to the person or entity paying for such signs within thirty (30) days of the erection of such signs. If the actual cost exceeds the estimated cost, an amount equal to the difference in such costs shall be remitted to the department in non-state funds within thirty (30) days of the sponsoring person or entity receiving an itemized invoice of the actual cost from the department.

BE IT FURTHER RESOLVED, that an enrolled copy of this resolution be transmitted to the commissioner of transportation.

